Isomac Venus

A Closer Look

Overview

The cardboard box was not as sturdy as used for the more expensive models reviewed to date (Zaffiro, Millennium and Relax) with no extra space for accessories to be added. Space was so limited in fact, that that the supplied accessories are placed in the water tank.

It is well built and designed using good quality components and has a solid feel; the steel gauge is slightly thinner than the Zaffiro, but still quite heavy and very good quality. The portafilter is the standard 58mm size, but definitely not the same as those on the Zaffiro, Millennium etc. which all use an E61 group. The Isomac E61 portafilters for these machines will **not fit" the Venus properly,** because the "ears" on the Venus portafilters are thinner. This is important should you wish to purchase a second portafilter to hold the double basket (or a second portafilter with a single spout.

The Venus had a marked tendency for the tube to be sucked onto the bottom of the tank when the in-line water filter was removed, so cutting the inlet tube to a V at the end is highly recommended.

Surprisingly no rattles from the Venus and there is a rubber sticky pad at the back of the tank (strange Isomac use them on a cheaper machine, but not the more expensive ones like the Zaffiro, which does rattle?)

The cup warmer tray is a very good size for this class of machine and gives enough height under standard size kitchen cabinets and filling is easy with a plastic cook's jug. The drip tray is also a good size, having sufficient capacity for all day use before emptying in most households.

Servicing the Venus will be very easy; strip down is fast and simple with only 2 screws needing to be removed to gain access for the majority of the repairs and little potential for error. Pump replacement is simplicity itself, with plenty of access around the pump. Internally the Venus is much simpler than HX machines; the positioning of components means that minor water spillage/leakage is very unlikely to cause any damage. This is a good point as most customers will not bother removing the tank for filling. It will be easy for the reseller to support the Venus, due to the easy access to internal components, good simple design and component replacement strategy that will be adopted.

The Barista equipment supplied free with the Venus is good quality, with some essential items required to make espressos and is usually an extra expense when buying an espresso machine.

In summary; The Isomac Venus is an espresso machine that will outlast cheaper brands and give many years of service. It looks great in the kitchen and is particularly suitable for the smaller kitchen. If you can't justify the expenditure on a more expensive machine, but still want Isomac quality, this is an ideal choice. Isomac are a major player in the Coffee machine market and have been supplying machines since 1977.

How it arrived and unpacking

The box is not as sturdy as those used with the more expensive machines (I was glad of the extra bubble wrap used by Bella Barista) and there is no room on the inside to pack accessories that will come with the machine. The standard supplied accessories are actually in the water tank; initially I thought they were missing. It could be that these come packed to you in a separate box along with the extra items supplied by Bella Barista, as I have

recommended they do this

It is quite easy to get the machine out of the box as there is plenty of space at the sides to reach down and get a good grip and the machine is not heavy. I was surprised that there was bubble wrap at the top rather than the cardboard packing pieces, which were only at the side as shown. This could have accounted for the damaged cup tray rail. I am sure that unless the cup rail was manufactured badly (which is a possibility), the damage could have happened in transit either from Italy or within the UK?

The Isomac comes with a manual that is of the usual poor standard common with these machines. It only covers the basics of machine operation and a very brief description of how to make coffee. The UK written Bella barista Guide will prove a valuable addition to this machine, especially as the system of lights can be confusing

Once in position on the counter the machine looks nice (in common with all Isomacs) and does not dominate on standard sized work surface. The Venus is especially ideal for the smaller kitchen or where space is at a premium. There is sufficient room under standard height kitchen cupboards to place espresso/standard cups on the good sized cup warmer tray. A corner positioning of the machine is ideal, especially when located near a sink

Preparing the Venus for use

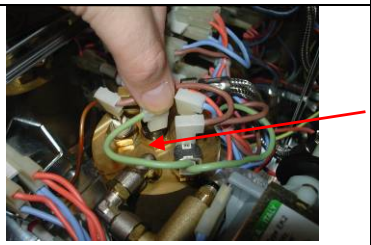
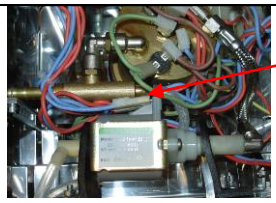
Before you switch on

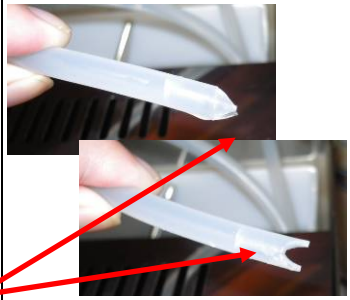
There is nothing to remove, peel off, portafilter baskets to assemble or any thing else to do other than lift the Venus onto the counter, wash the cold water tank, fill it with filtered water and remove any tape holding cup trays and the like.

Flushing the Venus before 1st use

I never like the idea of using a machine without thoroughly flushing it through, especially considering that the Venus may have stale water from factory testing (many months old), or manufacturing residues, Isomac mention nothing about doing this in their handbook, but this procedure is included in the UK Bella Barista guide "Getting the best from your Venus".

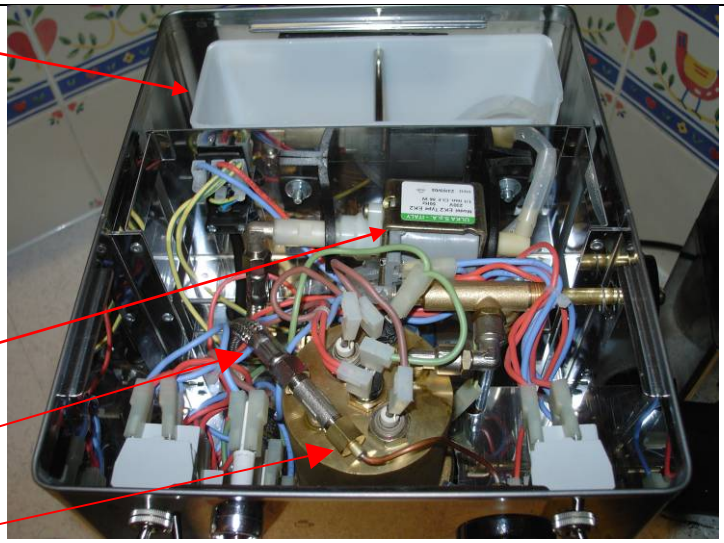
Key Features

Item/Description	Picture	Comments
The Venus had a larger "dead-band" than on more expensive Isomacs in the range. This "dead-band" coupled with a 0,4l boiler means "surfing the boiler" (pulling a shot at the top of the boilers heating cycle), is a useful technique. Temperature measurement showed ideal brew temperatures of around 92c at the top of the cycle "Dead-band" = The temperature range between the thermostat switching on and off		Unlike more expensive Isomac machines, the brew water thermostat is not adjustable.
The brew pressure of the Venus seemed on the high side		We will be discussing any reasons for this with Isomac to ensure the settings are optimal
The designers of the hot water/steam wand need to put far more work into drawing water from the wand. At the moment the system is not well suited to this task. At the top of the boiler cycle switching on the pump expels water and if hot, steam vigourously into a container. This water splashes with a risk of scalding. Always better to draw it into the milk jug, and sometimes even submerge the wand.	We will be asking if Isomac can do anything about this (possibly designing an accessory to fit when drawing hot water). It is a common thing I have found on all non HX Isomacs.	
No low water sensor of any kind. Sound of pump changes when water runs out.		You need to keep a good eye on the level of water in the tank.

The light system is not intuitive.		I don't expect Isomac to do anything about this. Just an observation
Don't like cheaper puffy plastic label		The metal ones that these (I understand) replace were excellent and gave an impression of quality. I am sure many could end up falling off with time, especially with the positioning by the drip tray. We will be talking to Isomac about this; we personally do not feel the new design label is an improvement.
The water feed tubes are quite long and have square cut ends. While the in-line water filter is on, there is not a problem. When it was removed (as it will be when exhausted or 1 month old). The tube persistently "sucked" onto the bottom of the tank and completely obstructed the flow of water to the pump. There is a recommendation in the user guide to cut it as shown.		Isomac should modify these tubes at the factory.
Steam wand mounted quite low, it's not a problem, but would be useful if it was mounted a little higher and was slightly longer The description on the Isomac web says it has 3 holes, I counted a few times, but there are only 2 holes		I am not sure why this couldn't have been mounted higher. We will recommend the wand is shortened here by about 30mm at their next redesign, which would raise the wand with the opportunity to make it longer.

Bella Barista
Nene Court, The Embankment,Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 1LD
Tel: 01933 273275
e-mail: clareo@towability.com

© Bella Barista

Water tank is nice quality and well finished. Big 3l capacity. **The Venus is a clean machine in use, the shower screen gets very little grounds after pulling a shot and cleanup is really quite easy.** 2 very small cleaning flushes are all that's required, this means that your not always filling the tank All components very accessible, especially the pump. Pump replacement will be a very easy and quick job. Steel braided high pressure pipe Reasonable size brass boiler 0.4 lit , enough water to gives good thermal stability during the shot Nice powerful **Ulka 56W pump (EK5)** good quality internal components Very large drip tray only needs emptying once a day. Nice quality feel. Case doesn't come off, but top plate, under cup warmer, does for access to internal components and its easy to remove (2 screws)	 	
Nice large cup tray		A piece of perforated non-slip matting works perfectly to stop the tray getting scratched. My Zaffiro cup warmer tray (shown). Pity manufacturers don't supply this.
Heavyweight group head appears to have good heat retention, but not an E61 so components and spares will be specific to the machine and group type		At bottom of boiler and forms part of boiler casing (no thermosyphon), also no flush required prior to "pulling a shot"
Pin switches are nice and have a good feel		I don't know why Isomac think they are better switched from left to right rather than up and down?
The Venus is a good steamer and easily makes plenty of microfoam. Certainly more powerful than the Millennium and other HX machines within the Isomac range. It of course won't have the same capacity as its not HX and no autofill		It's unbelievable but true. This machine steamed 400ml of water to 60c in 55 seconds. A millennium did the same in 70 seconds!

Bella Barista
Nene Court, The Embankment,Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 1LD
Tel: 01933 273275
e-mail: clareo@towability.com

© Bella Barista

Espresso

The Venus makes consistently good espressos and easily maintains the temperature during the pour. Domestic volumes of espresso one after another will be absolutely no problem with the Venus.

Steam Production

The Venus is a strong steamer. The steam wand is well designed, the 2 holes are not too large and are set at an angle so the milk swirls easily, warms quickly and you will have no problems producing copious amounts of microfoam at your first attempt.

Hot Water

The large boiler on the Venus does allow you to draw hot water; however, it is advisable to allow the system to recover before pulling more espressos. This makes it advisable to draw hot water after you have made all your espressos and before switching into steam mode for milk

Final Thoughts

The Venus looks really nice and is easy to keep clean, a quick wipe with a damp cloth and a buff with a microfibre cloth is all that's generally required to keep it looking great. The more complex tasks such as backflushing and descaling are actually very easy to do and the supplied UK guide explains how to do them in detail.

The Venus is less complex and runs a lot cooler than more expensive HX machines and would be ideal if you have an infrequent need to draw hot water or steam milk (e.g. 6 cappuccinos in a row). The Venus actually comes up to steam pressure fairly quickly, although it takes a while to cool down again if you want to make an espresso after steaming.

If you do have a need for; continuous hot water available any time, steam available any time and even while pulling espresso shots. Then you need a Heat Exchanger (HX) machine, such as the Isomac Millennium, Isomac Tea, Izzo Vivi etc. These do cost more, but are built to meet a slightly different consumer need

If you can stretch the budget a little more, I think it's always advisable to consider the Zaffiro, a little more money, but does step you into the "prosumer" category. This machine lacks some features of the "prosumer machines" like the Zaffiro and other more expensive machines within the Isomac range. **But if you don't have the space for a larger machine, or on a tight budget, the Venus gives you the ability to make coffee just like the professionals, in a very pretty package.**

Bella Barista
Nene Court, The Embankment,Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 1LD
Tel: 01933 273275
e-mail: clareo@towability.com

© Bella Barista